

VZCZCXYZ0002  
PP RUEHWEB

DE RUEHBO #1390/01 0592028  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
P 282028Z FEB 07  
FM AMEMBASSY BOGOTA  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 3030  
INFO RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY 7420  
RUEHCV/AMEMBASSY CARACAS PRIORITY 8744  
RUEHPE/AMEMBASSY LIMA PRIORITY 4809  
RUEHZP/AMEMBASSY PANAMA PRIORITY 0026  
RUEHQT/AMEMBASSY QUITO PRIORITY 5458  
RUEAWJA/DEPT OF JUSTICE WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY  
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC PRIORITY  
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 001390

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/28/2017  
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [PGOV](#) [CO](#)  
SUBJECT: PARA-POLITICAL SCANDAL FUELS URIBE DRIVE FOR  
POLITICAL REFORM

REF: BOGOTA 1169 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Charge Milton K. Drucker - Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

11. (C) Summary. The Supreme Court ordered the detention of nine Congressmen for alleged ties to ex-paramilitaries; that number is expected to grow. One group claims more than 80 legislators could eventually be implicated. The scandal has sparked calls for political and electoral reform; on February 24, President Uribe called on parties to agree to a series of reforms, including a transparency pact and the loss of seats for parties whose members are convicted of a crime. National election officials are also planning measures to prevent voter fraud in October local elections. Still, many political observers tell us that a larger, longer OAS and international monitoring presence will be needed to ensure transparency of the October elections. End summary.

Number of Implicated Politicians Growing...

=====

12. (C) Colombian institutions, including the Supreme Court, media, human rights groups and think tanks are investigating more than a hundred current and former politicians for alleged ties to paramilitaries. Eight Congressman and the former-chief of the Administrative Security Department (DAS) Jose Noguera are in jail, one Congressman is on the run in Europe, and five have been called to testify in the Supreme Court--along with two sitting governors (reftel). Several investigations of former officials and businessmen are underway, and numerous other politicians have been accused of para links by the media and human rights groups. Charges range from meeting with paramilitary leaders, accepting illegal campaign contributions and vote rigging, to participating in paramilitary violence. With additional testimony expected from former-para leaders through the Justice and Peace process, we expect more politicians to be implicated. Contacts in Congress tell us 19 more members of Congress may soon be called to testify in the Supreme Court. Despite these unsettling revelations, our contacts agree that the process is a necessary catharsis for Colombia that is leading towards a strengthening and cleansing of Colombian institutions.

13. (C) In addition to the Supreme Court and Prosecutor General Office (Fiscalia) investigations, Colombian think tank Arco Iris will release a study--partly financed by the Swedish Development Corp (ASDI)--on March 5 showing voting irregularities in the 2006 elections of 50 representatives and 33 senators. Arco Iris investigators told us key

indicators include: unprecedented percentages for leading candidates in suspect municipalities (30-40 percent norms for leading candidates, versus totals approaching 90 percent in a few extreme cases), unusually high numbers of blank or spoiled ballots (6-7 percent norm, versus 30-40 percent in suspect races), overly high voter turnout, and the appearance of new political parties in regions previously controlled by paramilitaries. ASDI officials told they were not pleased with the study's methodology, which they said likely overstates para influence.

#### ...As Are Calls for Political Reform

14. (U) The para-political scandal has prompted political reform proposals from nearly all major political parties. President Uribe used his weekly Community Council meeting on February 24, to call on political parties to agree to a series of consensus reforms, including a transparency pact, to insulate elections from the influence of armed or criminal groups. Uribe said there would be no delay in the October local elections. He proposed the following reforms, and asked all parties to support them:

- First, Coalition Parties would agree to a "Transparency Pact" publicizing campaign donations and pledging to insulate candidates from the pressure of armed or criminal groups;
- If a member of Congress is convicted of a crime, that member's political party would lose a Congressional seat and have to return all funds received by the member to the government;

- Parties could risk their standing to run in national elections if their number of seats were to fall below minimum legal levels;

- Longer-term, all candidates would have to publish all campaign contributions, and all votes in Congress would be

public;

- A reexamination of the present national vote for senate races.

15. (U) National Election Registrar Juan Carlos Galindo, responsible for election integrity, said on February 25 he will introduce measures to ensure the integrity of the October elections. Local registrars in at-risk departments and municipalities will be randomly rotated leading up to elections to prevent pre-cooked fraud. National monitors from Bogota will be sent to these same districts to support local officials, and security forces will be at the disposal of election monitoring officials. Finally, Galindo will institute a process to vet and select diverse sets of local voting boards. Vice President Francisco Santos followed Galindo's comments with a call to all party leaders (coalition and opposition) to meet March 1 to discuss the October elections. He plans to propose and formulate a formal vetting process for all candidates in those elections in order to remove those with ties to armed or criminal groups.

#### International Observation

16. (C) Colombian political leaders are looking to the international community to provide support to the GoC and enhanced election monitoring to protect the October elections against the influence of armed or criminal groups. Liberal Senator Cecilia Lopez, Arco Iris' Director Valencia, and U Party President Carlos Garcia told us previous election monitoring missions by the OAS and others were valuable, but did not provide the broad and lengthy observation needed to be to be effective. For October's election, they recommend that larger teams of OAS and international observers be deployed to critical regions up to a month in advance of the elections to backstop the GoC's efforts to prevent fraud and intimidation leading up to the vote. Valencia added that despite his call for enhanced international observation, he believes para influence in the October regional elections will be less pervasive than in 2003. The demobilization of para structures, detention of key leaders, and exposure of para-political links has severely weakened the paras' capacity to influence the political process.

